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ABSTRACT

The booklet is intended to develop advocacy skills in those concerned with the education of gifted and talented children in California. Sample chapters have the following titles: "As an Advocate How Do You Measure Up?" "Why Is Advocacy Important?" "What Are the Goals of Advocacy in California?" "Where and How Does One Become an Advocate for the Gifted/Talented?" "Who Are the Decision Makers?" "How Can One Become an Effective Advocate at the State (and/or National) Level?" "Who Is an Effective Advocate?" "What Are the Essential Conditions for an Effective State/National Advocacy Movement?" "How To Write an Effective Letter"; "Information Useful for Advocacy Purposes"; "Early History of the California Association for the Gifted (CAG)"; "What California Organizations Can Advocates Join?" "CAG's Ten Regions." (DB)

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ADVOCACY HANDBOOK for GIFTED/TALENTED EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA

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ADVOCACY HANDBOOK FOR GIFTED/TALENTED EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA

CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION FOR THE GIFTED

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Why This Booklet?

The *Advocacy Handbook for Gifted/Talented Education in California* has been written for everyone who believes that more must be done educationally to prepare our most capable children to meet the challenge of the future.

The purpose of the handbook is threefold:

1. To broaden the base of active participation in California's advocacy movement to ensure that all gifted/talented children have equal opportunity to be educated to their fullest potential.

2. To provide information on how to become an effective advocate.

3. To describe the structure of the advocacy movement in California as it exists under the auspices and leadership of the California Association for the Gifted (CAG), CAG's State Parent Council, and affiliated organizations.

As An Advocate
How Do You Measure Up?

Directions: Measure your advocacy efforts by checking the "yes" or "no" box as you respond to each question below.

Yes	No	
☐	☐	Have you written a letter to a legislator on behalf of gifted/talented children?
☐	☐	Have you attended a school board meeting in support of gifted/talented children?
☐	☐	Have you expressed appreciation for your local gifted/talented program to your school superintendent?
☐	☐	Have you helped in your area to increase community awareness of the needs of gifted/talented children?
☐	☐	Have you made contact with a school board member(s) regarding the gifted/talented program in your district?
☐	☐	Have you expressed your support and/or appreciation to a local teacher and/or site administrator for the gifted/talented program?
☐	☐	Have you joined an organization that is supporting gifted/talented education?
☐	☐	Have you helped to publicize the positive activities or aspects of gifted/talented programs?
☐	☐	Have you made a contribution(s) to CAG's Political Action Committee?
☐	☐	Have you volunteered your time in behalf of gifted/talented education?

Give yourself one point for each "yes" response. Tabulate the total number of "yes" responses and turn to the next page for an indication of how your advocacy efforts "measure up."

YOUR MEASURE

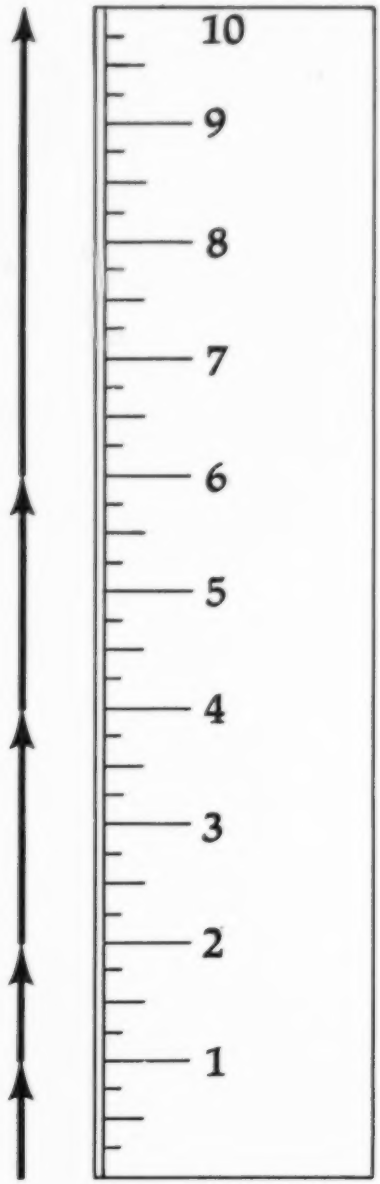
OUTSTANDING
You regard advocacy for gifted/talented as a top priority

GOOD
You regard advocacy as a high priority

FAIR
You regard advocacy as a priority

POOR
You regard advocacy as a low priority

TERRIBLE!
You regard advocacy as a very low priority!



YOUR "YES" RESPONSES

Why Is Advocacy Important?

In California especially, where gifted/talented education is not mandated, advocacy efforts must be unceasing. While the successes of California's advocacy movement have been impressive, support for the education of gifted/talented youth does not culminate with the passage of federal or state legislation, the approval of a district program, or the membership of an individual in CAG. If gifted/talented education is perceived by decision makers as having a strong advocacy base, it will become more difficult for these decision makers to cut funds and programs.

Continuous efforts to support and improve the education of these students are of paramount importance and must become part of our daily social and professional interaction. Each interaction can be viewed as a chance to "advocate" for the purpose of developing a more informed and responsive population many of whom can eventually be identified as active supporters of gifted/talented education.

The success of advocacy efforts is dependent on those who are informed about the education of gifted/talented students and who can confront and communicate with others who are not well informed.

EACH INDIVIDUAL IS IMPORTANT.
IT IS A MATTER OF SURVIVAL!

What Are The Goals Of Advocacy In California?

The goals of the advocacy movement in California are to:

- Ensure the implementation of quality programs for gifted/talented youth.
- Disseminate information regarding the unique needs of gifted/talented children.
- Provide an ongoing support base to ensure that upon termination of legislation currently governing programs in California new and improved legislation will be enacted to provide programs for gifted/talented children.
- Demonstrate that programs with certain characteristics can and do make a difference for gifted/talented children.
- Increase awareness that quality programs for the gifted/talented have the effect of upgrading programs for students in general.
- Urge local, state, and federal officials to give the gifted/talented their priority and attention.

Advocates for gifted and talented education reflect consensus on these important goals.

AS ADVOCATES WE HAVE A CHANCE OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS TO MAKE EVEN GREATER PROGRESS TOWARD THESE GOALS. PERSUADING DECISION MAKERS TO SUPPORT AND/OR ADOPT NEW POLICIES IS A SLOW AND DIFFICULT PROCESS. THE OUTCOME DEPENDS ON HOW WE SPEND OUR ENERGIES NOW.

Where And How Does One Become An Advocate For The Gifted/Talented?

Key questions to answer in assessing one's readiness and ability to advocate are:

- Do I have a strong and enthusiastic belief in differentiated education for gifted/talented children?
- Can I respond with reason and/or data as well as with emotions or feelings?

One develops the skills to become an advocate through:

- Knowledge/information (**what** one knows)
- Contacts (**who** one knows)
- Participation/Affiliation (**where** one puts the information/contact to use)

One becomes an advocate by recognizing and acting upon opportunities **to inform** and **to persuade** others. Opportunities to perform as an advocate can be both informal and formal and exist at the local, state and national levels.

STEP ONE: BECOME INFORMED

Knowledge/information all advocates need to acquire include answers to the following questions.

1. What are California's provisions for the gifted/talented?
2. Who are the gifted/talented? How are they identified in the local area?
3. Why are programs needed?
4. What types of programs function for the gifted/talented in the local area? How are the teachers selected?
5. How are parents, and how can parents be, involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluating of gifted/talented programs within their local area?
6. What advocacy organizations are available to educators and parents of the gifted/talented?

It is essential that parents and professional educators recognize the need to communicate clearly the answers to these questions and the issues generated by the answers. The goals of advocacy will not be advanced unless parents and educators work cooperatively giving each other much needed mutual support.

STEP TWO: BECOME INVOLVED AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Parent Involvement

In the advocacy movement, no one is more important than parents who are interested in their children's education. Most parent advocates begin at the local level by supporting school activities and becoming informed—talking with and asking questions of parents, teachers (especially teachers who believe in the program), school principals, and other administrators. Also, as parents become involved they can read some of the many books, magazines, and articles on gifted/talented education which have been written in recent years. Frequently these published materials can be borrowed by parents from teachers, district program coordinators, or local gifted/talented chidren's associations. In addition, parents can become informed by:

- joining a national or state gifted/talented organization, such as the California Association for Gifted (CAG) and/or local regional parent associations.
- becoming a member of a local group, such as a gifted children's association or a school or district parent advisory council.
- seeking information from the administrator or person responsible for the gifted/talented program at the local district level and from the State Department of Education's Gifted/Talented Managment Team (GATE).
- attending meetings related to general education, such as schoolboard meetings, Back-to-School nights, and public forums.
- subscribing to publications on gifted/talented education, such as *Roeper Review, G/C/T,* or the *CAG Communicator.*

Educator Involvement

Parents are not alone in the advocacy movement. Teachers and administrators responsible for the development and implementation of quality gifted/talented programs serve as advocates within their district or county organizations.

The role of educators as advocates at the local level is different from that of parents and other community members. California's experience with gifted/talented education has shown that professional advocates will not continue for long in that capacity without a sincere and enthusiastic belief in the need for special programs. Because professional educators have information about gifted/talented children and district programs, and because they have the opportunity to make contact with many parents, they have a responsibility to:

- share their knowledge about gifted/talented education.
- provide opportunities for parent involvement at the local level.
- encourage others to become involved in the advocacy movement.
- actively participate in gifted/talented organizations.

While many advocates, both parent and professional, are already involved in local programs, organizations, or gifted children's associations, too few have moved into advocacy for gifted/talented children within the broader community or with state and national decision makers.

Informal Advocacy Opportunities

- discussion with individual, friends, neighbors, and school personnel.
- attendance at specified meetings related to gifted/talented education, such as parent education meetings, **Back-to-School** nights, and local gifted/talented workshops offered by district/county organizations.
- participation on committees designed to enrich educational opportunities for young people.

Formal Opportunities

- writing letters to or visiting decision makers such as school superintendents, board members, and legislators.
- giving testimony as requested by school district personnel or by gifted/talented organizations.
- making monetary contributions, such as joining a gifted/talented organization and contributing to CAG's Political Action Committee (CAG/PAC) organizational fund raisers or political campaigns.
- sponsoring a local meeting about advocacy, and/or bringing in a speaker (free speakers can be found within the membership of CAG and affiliate organizations).
- becoming a member of an organization which supports gifted/talented education.
- donating time to a local political campaign, making the candidate aware of your interest and concern for gifted/talented education.

Who Are The Decision Makers?

BACK HOME WITH YOU, THE CITIZEN-ELECTOR!

Members of the Local Public School Board of Education

The people who serve on your local public school board are no less important for the future of gifted/talented education in your area than the Governor and the legislators in Sacramento.

At the local school district members of the Board of Education are elected to:

- reflect community thinking
- reflect school issues to the community
- adopt policies for government of itself and the schools
- employ personnel and delegate authority and responsibility
- evaluate

School board members are faced with the necessity of making difficult education decisions. It is imperative that advocacy at this level be well planned and coordinated if gifted/talented programs are to survive. Each local community may be at a different state of development in meeting the needs of gifted/talented students.

As a constituent and resident of the board member's community and/or a member of a district staff, one can advocate by:

- contacting the school principal to acquire information about the district's program(s).
- asking the district superintendent or a board member to request a district presentation to the board on the GATE program or some aspect of the program—its goals, accomplishments, etc. (Note: The calendar of board presentations is often scheduled very early in the school year.)
- requesting individual visits to the program, preferably one board member at a time, accompanied by one or two parents known to him/her and by making sure visitors know the goals of the program, have opportunities to speak with students and see work done.
- providing a fact sheet on the history of state and local programs, etc. Elicit interest in and support for the program before crisis develops by talking informally with board members. Knowledge about specific district program successes is always of interest to board members.
- as a parent, sending a letter to board members telling them about your child's personal experiences and your appreciation for the board members' support of gifted/talented programs. The frustrating reality is that parents or community members with complaints are heard from far more often than those with compliments, thus distorting perception of programs.
- citing anecdotal information on program "graduates." Where do they go? What do they accomplish? Do they attribute part of their success to participation in program? Such individual, local-level information is enormously impressive to board members faced with hard decisions.

- monitoring board meetings. A parent, perhaps identified with a lapel button, could be present at most board meetings. The parent(s) should be sure to "sign in." Not only will this keep board members aware of the advocate's interest in gifted/talented education, but it will also help the advocate communicate with members of the board about their responsibilities, concerns, and problems.
- writing thank-you letters to board members and school personnel for their interest in and support of gifted/talented education.
- helping to elect board members. Interview candidates prior to election as to their viewpoint toward the education of gifted and talented. Advocates or an advocate group may decide to support one or more candidates with volunteer time, money, etc. Support, in case of endorsement of more than one candidate, should be more personalized, e.g., one group of parents work on one campaign, another group on second campaign.
- getting oneself elected to the board!

Some Other Important Community Members

Many people other than school-board members in the local community can also significantly influence decisions related to education. Some people to consider contacting and involving in advocacy efforts are:

- elected community leaders, such as councilmen, county board of supervisors, and county schoolboard members. An elected official who is willing to speak or write in behalf of gifted/talented education carries the weight of five to ten parents and educators writing letters.
- people interested in education who may be your friends or neighbors and who have close ties to members of the legislature or to elected or other leaders in your community.
- leaders in the various ethnic or minority communities. One of the most powerful actions gifted/talented advocates can take is to find and enlist advocates among these communities.
- PTA and other school leaders. It is best to choose those who are most listened to and respected by board members.
- representatives of professional groups such as lawyers, doctors, journalists, dentists, engineers, and nurses.
- teachers in regular classrooms.
- college and university instructors and officials.
- religious leaders.
- corporate officials, business and industrial leaders who are becoming increasingly concerned with our position in the world as innovative leaders. For this reason they are becoming more interested in enhancing elementary and secondary education.
- leaders in other organized groups, such as the Association of American University Women (AAUW), League of Women Voters, chambers of commerce, Lions, Rotary, and groups which support the arts.

Reaching out to members of the broader community not only opens the way for others to advocate for gifted/talented programs, but also may create unexpected and vital educational opportunities for children in the local programs. Students who can become constructively and actively involved in the community are their own best advocates.

WHO CAN INFLUENCE LOCAL DESCISION MAKERS?
YOU CAN!

How Can One Become An Effective Advocate At The State (And/Or National) Level?

STEP ONE: BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF INDIVIDUAL EFFORT

Face-to-face contacts, letters, telephone calls, and telegrams sent to your legislators' local offices and/or to Sacramento (or Washington, D.C.) with irrefutable information are effective instruments of political battle. The individual citizen is a very powerful force in political reality. The individual citizen has always had the option of telling his/her senator or assemblyman precisely how to vote on policy issues, but most of the population does not exercise this option. Political ignorance and apathy are very well established facts of life in this country—voter participation in many elections is extremely low. Grass roots advocacy, however, can encourage people to become involved in policy decisions.

Most legislators are not aware of details about California's gifted/talented program. In fact, many may know very little about public education generally. This is to be expected because, while all legislators have their own areas of specialty in legislative affairs, those specialties are not always in the area of education. Legislators, as well as most people in other fields, tend, thus, to relate to school matters on the basis of their own and/or their children's experiences. Many may not have had contact with the public schools in years.

STEP TWO: GET TO KNOW YOUR ELECTED LEGISLATORS (OR CONGRESSMEN) YOURSELF.

A good place to begin is to introduce yourself to your newly elected legislator. Whether you supported this winning legislator or not, get acquainted. Meeting your legislator is best done before the activities of the new session begin, when there is usually more time to talk; however, you can get together at any time. Legislative sessions adjourn in the fall, and this is a good time to find your senator or assemblyman in the local area. Also, most legislators are in Sacramento only three or four days a week. Friday is often the best day to contact your legislator in the "home" office. The legislator's local office is his/her "home" office. Use this first meeting to get acquainted and establish yourself as a credible resource on gifted/talented education. However, avoid discussion of substantive issues without some forewarning. If you intend to focus on a particular issue at a subsequent meeting, let your legislator's office know this at the time you schedule a meeting. Your contact with your legislator at the local level is effective because you are the constituent dealing with local needs.

Each legislator has a home district staff and a Sacramento staff. In the home office a constituent can expect to find a staff of four or five people. In the legislator's Sacramento office will be at least a legislative or administrative aide and a receptionist/secretary. All of these people are of great importance to the legislator in the everyday operation and duties of his/her offices and in the decision-making process.

The legislator's aides play a major role in the development of legislation, much of which would not emerge without their labor. They write speeches, deal with lobbyists, handle constituent concerns, draft bills, negotiate with opponents of proposed legislation, compose research reports, mobilize public opinion, and advise legislators on how to vote. If you cannot meet with your legislator immediately, talk to the others in his/her offices. Ask their opinion about your concerns. If you do not know an answer to a question they ask, do not be afraid to say so. If you think the answer is available, offer to get it.

Other opportunities of which you can take advantage will arise during the year. Stay informed of your legislator's planned visits or "town meetings" in the district and try to attend them. When attending a function where a legislator appears, reintroduce yourself and state the cause you advocate. Also, legislators frequently have specialized mailings on broad interest topics. Ask your legislator to put you on the education mailing list if he or she has one. Again, don't overlook the importance of establishing yourself with your legislator's local staff. You can become a primary resource to them.

STEP THREE: BECOME INVOLVED IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS THROUGH AN ADVOCACY ORGANIZATION

Californians elect, in addition to the Governor, eighty members to the California State Assembly, and forty members to the State Senate.

Advocates who wish to influence legislation at the state or national level are most effective within an organizational structure. While senators, assemblymen, and other elected officials are responsive to the individual men and women who put them into office, they are also responsive to organized groups who have agreed upon their goals and who represent a large membership. Michael McClosky of the Sierra Club said, "With the exception of a few broad questions relating to peace, war and taxation, most citizens are not going to write their congressmen with specific information unless they get it from a specialized association. The work of these associations should not be discounted as some sort of aberration in the democratic process. Rather, it should be recognized as the primary channel for citizen involvement."

In addition, advocates at this level need to understand the legislative process and be able to follow legislation as it passes through committees. This can be learned as a kind of on-the-job training while working with others in an advocacy organization. CAG's professional lobbyist is the person closest to and with the most understanding of this process.

In California, all laws are enacted through the medium of bills. A bill is a draft of a proposed law. The idea for a bill may come from an individual citizen, lobbyist, organization, or elected officials. A bill either proposes new legislation, or it repeals or amends an existing law. Before a bill becomes a law it must pass through hearings by standing committees (and their subcommittees) in both houses and be passed by a roll-call vote on the floor of both houses. Such hearings are open to the public. If both houses pass the bill it is sent to the Governor. Within twelve days the Governor may sign the bill into law, allow the bill to become law without his signature, or veto it.

A LARGE GATHERING OF ADVOCATES IN SUPPORT OF THE SAME ISSUE IS ALWAYS NOTICED AT A MEETING, EVEN IF NO ONE SPEAKS.

Advocates must have close contact with this legislative process. The timing of advocate and lobbyist input is critical. If, however, members of the advocacy movement have not done the groundwork—worked continuously at home towards persuading decision makers, in this instance with their local legislators, that their goals are vitally important—such "last minute" input may not be effective. Thousands of bills pass through the legislature each year, and the pressures upon each legislator are great.

Standing committees specialize in specific subject areas. Those of greatest importance to educational issues are Assembly Education, Senate Education, Assembly Ways and Means, and Senate Finance. While your local senator or assemblyman may not serve on these committees, he or she has opportunities to influence committee members, as well as to cast one vote when the bill reaches the floor of the respective houses.

Also, when voters in 1966 created the present full-time legislature, they simulataneously created a new class of professionals called "staffers" who advise the legislators in Sacramento. These advisors, who are employed by Assembly and Senate-wide committees and other governmental agencies, and who have never received a single vote at the polls, maintain and exercise significant power in their own right. While legislators are elected or re-elected for two or four-year terms, the influence of these advisors often spans the political careers of many different legislators. These advisors work in the offices of Assembly Research, Senate Research, the Auditor General, the Legislative Analyst, and the Legislative Council. They also draft bills, deal with lobbyists, negotiate with authors of legislation, and advise legislators on how to vote. Reports from officials such as the Legislative Analyst and the Auditor General have had considerable impact on the legislation for the gifted/talented. The advisors often have more to do with making laws than do the prestigious members of the State Legislature or members of Congress. Being a member of a gifted/talented state organization will enable you to be informed about the activities of these advisors as they look at gifted/talented programs. Staffers are the powers behind the powerful.

AND — DON'T FORGET THE GOVERNOR!

While the supreme executive power of the State of California is conferred upon the Governor, he operates, out of necessity, as a "legislator" to accomplish and put into execution the policies of his administration. He both initiates and influences legislation. Also, the Governor's Budget is replete with policy as well as fiscal implications. While the Governor may veto any bill passed by the legislature, he may also reduce or eliminate one or more items of appropriation while approving other portions of the bill.

The need for advocacy does not end, however, with the enactment of a law. Laws are often very general, sometimes ambiguous, and sometimes in conflict with other laws. Further interpretations are made by other governmental agencies so that the laws can be implemented. For these reasons it is important to follow the law into its implementation stages.

Statutes relating to education are executed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction under the policy direction of the California State Board of Education. He is a nonpartisan officer of the State of California.

The Superintendent is elected at the same time and place as the Governor for a term of four years. Among the duties of the State Superintendent is to be the Secretary and Executive Officer of the State Board of Education. Members of the State Board are appointed by the Governor.

Becoming involved at the state level may seem formidable, but after the first contact your confidence will grow. Remember, you are the only one who can advocate for these students, as they generally are not able to influence decision makers in Sacramento (or Washington, D.C.) on their own behalf and do not appear to the public to have needs such as the more visible physically handicapped or culturally disadvantaged.

How to Obtain Up-to-date Legislative Information

Advocates can obtain each year a current ROSTER AND GOVERNMENT GUIDE for $1.00 (a single copy) from:

California Journal Roster
1617 10th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

This publication lists all state constitutional officers, State Department Board, Commissions, Departments, Congressional Delegation, and members of the State Legislature and standing committees, as well as a description of how to keep track of legislation and the legislative process. You may also want to subscribe to the monthly *California Journal* for more complete information on government and politics.

In addition, advocates may secure Assembly and Senate Daily Files, Journals, and Histories. (One copy of each can be obtained from the Legislative Bill Room, State Capitol, Sacramento, CA 95814.) Also, local newspapers carry information on bills.

THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS
DOES WORK.

Who Is An Effective Advocate?

EFFECTIVE ADVOCATES ARE:

– *Well informed on their subject* and have information supporting their goals. (While decision makers expect professionals to have special knowledge, this expectation does not hold as true for parents. Anecdotal information from parents is most effective.)

- — *Modest*
- — *Sincere*
- — *Tactful*
- — *Respectful of others' points of view*
- — *Sensitive to others' reactions*
- — *Knowledgeable about the power hierarchy*
- — *Quietly Persistent*
- — *Resourceful and Imaginative*
- — *Enthusiastic*
- — *Articulate*
- — *Well organized*
- — *Politically aware*

– *Knowledgeable about their constituency.* (While advocates most often are speaking for themselves as individuals, they are sometimes authorized to speak as a representative of an organization. An advocate must be aware of the difference.)

Effective advocates must do their homework ahead of time if they wish to influence policy decisions and legislation. Such homework includes being sure that their requests are specific and their proposals are solidly documented. In addition, it is important that advocates know their school officials' and other decision makers' assignments, areas of expertise, and areas of interest.

Remember that decision makers are obligated to be aware of the entire story and they must look at the total educational picture when making decisions. In this regard, effective advocates are prepared to answer possible criticism and to explain why gifted/talented education should be a high priority.

Advocates, for example, must be prepared to respond to "negative" questions or comments. Briefly, such comments/questions and possible brief responses might be as follows:

1. Why isn't the education of a gifted/talented child the parent's responsibility?

   The education of all children is shared responsibility—the home, the school, and the community.

2. Aren't the programs you're asking for good for all the children?

   Anything which is learned that is helpful educationally to gifted/talented children in general is helpful to other children, and where effective gifted/talented programs exist there is positive "spill-over" into the general curriculum and guidance programs. In addition, an emphasis in gifted/talented education is in working towards excellence in schools. The difference between programs for children in regular programs and those in special gifted/talented programs is in curriculum breadth or depth, instructional pacing, and education and guidance opportunities aimed at nurturing the special/unusual abilities and interests of gifted/talented children.

3. My child was in a gifted/talented program but it just meant more homework, so I withdrew him/her.

   As there are concerns and issues relating to general education, there are still unresolved problems and issues in gifted/talented education. Concerns about teacher support and training remains critical to both. For this reason, a major emphasis of state and local gifted/talented programs has been on appropriate teacher training.

4. I (or my children) did well in school without being in a gifted/talented program.

   Considerable evidence is available showing that, while some individuals do develop their gifts/talents despite lack of education and guidance, many others do not. Giftedness is maintained and enhanced when the school, home, and/or the community environment is rich with opportunities. All children must be challenged by school work in keeping with their abilities.

   Also, there are many gifted/talented individuals who may not have been thought to be gifted/talented due to cultural diversity, socio-economic status, or geographic isolation. Gifted/talented children come from all backgrounds.

5. Don't gifted/talented programs lead to elitism?

   To the contrary, the social consequences of such ability grouping and educational individualization are not inevitably negative to gifted/talented children or to others. The interpersonal climate and values in the home, the educational system, and among members of the wider community affect such perceptions. Gifted/talented children need to interact with and have experiences with other gifted/talented children who have similar abilities, interests, and talents—grouping is one way to provide for this. Elitism is learned, mostly from adults in the child's community.

INEFFECTIVE ADVOCATES ARE:

- *Militant*
- *Verbose*
- *Threatening*
- *Recriminating*
- *Insensitive to others' problems or points of view*
- *Incapable of compromise*
- *Without a sense of humor*
- *Omnipresent*
- *Hysterical*
- *Unaware of the diversity among gifted/talented children*

ADVOCACY, SUPPORTED BY KNOWLEDGE, GOOD SENSE,
GOOD HUMOR, AND HUMILITY,
HAS BEEN ENORMOUSLY SUCCESSFUL.
WITHOUT THE GROWING STATE ADVOCACY MOVEMENT
OF THE PAST TWO DECADES
GIFTED/TALENTED PROGRAMS IN CALIFORNIA
WOULD NOT EXIST.

What Are The Essential Conditions For An Effective State/National Advocacy Movement?

A STATE ORGANIZATION

A state organization of people who have reached consensus on their goals is a vital element in providing cohesive leadership for an advocacy movement. Such an organization provides continuous and maximum communication through the state (and/or nation). The California Association for the Gifted, its State Parent Council and Affiliates, serve in this capacity.

Within the state organization implementation of the following conditions are requisite for effective advocacy:

- Each concerned individual, parent, and professional assumes responsibility.
- There is a solidly cohesive organizational base. Parents and educators are not only allies, but co-partners. There is agreement upon all major philosophical points. Each advocate can work alone, but the impact is greater when advocates work together.
- The activities of the advocates are coordinated, sometimes delegated by a larger organization. A communication network within the organization is established.
- The advocacy goals are constantly kept in mind. The advocate's role should not be used for ego satisfaction alone! The interpersonal relationships among members of an advocacy movement are critical to its success.
- Tasks are matched with advocates' skills/talents, and advocates are selected to match or complement the person they are to influence.
- Appropriate and persuasive information is gathered for dissemination and presentation.
- A Legislative Committee is established to propose, study, support/not support legislation directly related to gifted education, to lobby for passage of supported bills, and to operate for the good of the whole.
- A Political Action Committee is established to raise money to financially support issues and state candidates favorable to gifted/talented education.

"VICTORY IN LEGISLATION AND PUBLIC POLICY—
LIKE SUCCESS IN OTHER WALKS OF LIFE—
HAS ITS ROOTS IN SOUND ORGANIZATION,
THOUGHTFUL PLANNING, UNCEASING COOPERATION,
IMAGINATIVE LIAISON, CONSTANT SURVEILLANCE,
AND JUST PLAIN HARD WORK."

Sam Halperin, Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL)
Washington D.C.

ANOTHER ADVOCATE—THE PROFESSIONAL LOBBYIST

The California Association for the Gifted employs a professional lobbyist in Sacramento. This professional lobbyist, who plays a critical and vital role, would be much less effective without the many individuals involved in the advocacy movement.

There is a professional lobbyist for almost every organized or special interest group in California. A professional advocate lobbyist is a skilled persuader, a person adept in phrasing a question in a way that influences the answer, a person who knows how to marshall facts to support a predetermined conclusion. While a lobbyist would soon destroy his/her effectiveness if he/she provided false data, one safely operates on the assumption that his/her information may be somewhat biased and certainly self-serving. (For this reason it has long been deemed important that information about lobbyists, their purposes, and the source of their support be noted in the public record.)

A lobbyist attempts to advance or otherwise secure favorable treatment for or against legislation by influencing public officials before the beginning, during, or following the completion of the legislative process. A lobbyist advocates for the movement and supports its point of view with detailed facts and figures, spelling out the impact of the law.

WITHOUT THE IMMENSE RESEARCH EFFORT BY INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS, THE TASK OF LEGISLATION WOULD BE MUCH MORE DIFFICULT.

A LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

A review of the CAG Bylaws clarifies the functions of the Legislative Committee and State Parent Council.

Article VI, Sec. 8 states, "The Legislative Committee shall study legislation affecting the gifted, make recommendations and disseminate information in cooperation with the Public Committee."

The stated functions of the Legislative Committee are:

- analyze all legislation affecting the gifted program
- maintain contact with and stimulate action for the Legislative Advocate
- make recommendations to the CAG Executive Board and State Parent Council based on input from the Legislative Advocate and an analysis of the committee
- monitor the interpretation and implementation of legislation affecting the gifted program

At the beginning of each organizational year, the chairperson and designated representatives of the State Parent Council and Legislative Committee will meet to establish common and/or differing goals to direct action for their groups. These goals will be presented to the Executive Board for ratification. In the event the CAG Executive Board and State Parent Council have a major difference of opinion regarding advocacy goals and/or specific actions, a Conference Committee shall be called by a majority vote of the CAG Executive Board, CAG Executive Committee, or State Parent Council. The Conference Committee shall include an equal number of CAG Executive Board and State Parent Council members. Committee members shall be appointed by the CAG President and State Parent Council Chairperson. Committee expenses shall be charged to each participating group.

A member of CAG may express the official opinion and/or response of the organization only when the member has been designated as the association's representative by Board and/or committee approval.

PARENT PARTICIPATION—
THE STATE PARENT COUNCIL

Article VI, Sec. 11 states, "The State Parent Council shall consist of one elected State Parent Council Representative from each of the State Parent Regions. They shall service as a decision-making body to plan, implement, and evaluate policies relating to parent advocacy and awareness on behalf of gifted education. Committee members are elected by the Regional Parent Councils."

It shall be the function of the State Parent Council to plan, implement, and evaluate strategies to promote parent advocacy and parent awareness.

- Develop an advocacy which includes promoting and maintaining a visible political profile with all agencies involved in the decision making process in gifted and talented education (i.e., local school boards, Legislature, State Department of Education, State Board of Education).
- Recruit parents of gifted and talented students for CAG membership and elicit the support of parents and professionals for the advocacy effort.
- Increase the knowledge base of parent members through inservices and written information.
- Develop short- and long-term advocacy goals and keep the CAG Board and Legislative Committee apprised of parent goals and actions.
- Coordinate advocacy and maintain a communication system with the Regional Parent Councils.

The State Parent Council Chairperson shall serve as the communication link between the State Parent Council (Regional Councils) and CAG Executive Board and Legislative Committee. The State Parent Council Chairperson shall make reports regarding advocacy strategy and disseminate minutes, written reports, etc., to the Executive Board. Minutes will be exchanged between the State Parent Council and the Executive Board.

A POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE

The California Association for the Gifted has a Political Action Committee established to provide effective processes for expanding CAG's active advocacy program. CAG has always been an advocate of gifted/talented students. The current political and educational climate, as well as our commitment to quality education, require that CAG work harder than ever in its advocacy efforts.

ADVOCACY COSTS MONEY

Advocates must be organized and ready when the need occurs to financially support issues and candidates who support gifted/talented. To do this and to maintain our strong position as an advocacy group, a powerful Political Action Committee must be functioning.

The purpose of CAG/PAC is to raise and collect monies via assessment of the membership and/or voluntary contributions; to determine by the accepted process which state level candidates for public office and other state ballot issues favor public education programs for the gifted/talented; to endorse such candidates and ballot issues; to allocate monies to the candidate(s) and/or ballot issues; to assist in the campaign(s); and to operate for the good of the whole.

The PAC governance structure consists of five members appointed as follows:

- One member appointed by the CAG President from active membership
- Two members appointed by the CAG Board from active membership
- One member appointed by the Legislative Committee from that committee's membership
- One member appointed by the State Parent Council from its membership
- Advisory member: legislative advocate

PAC selects its own chairperson and other designated officers.

PAC ENDORSEMENT PROCESS

The decision to endorse a candidate or ballot proposition is weighed against the question, Where will it make the most impact for the gifted/talented? Each political race/issue is looked at differently, depending upon such factors as the type of race or issue, the amount of influence the candidate has, and its direct relationship to gifted/talented education.

Sources of information included in the decision-making process:

- Legislative advocate
- Legislative Committee
- State Parent Council
- members in the local area
- voting records in committee and on the floor
- collections of newspaper and magazine clippings
- information directly from the candidates (interview or written answers to questions)
- candidate speeches

Endorsement is followed by dissemination of information to the membership, allocation of funds to the campaign, assistance in campaigning, and participation in fund raisers and testimonials.

The CAG Board is inserviced at least once per year relative to political action. Workshops in political action are held at the local level by the regional representatives to the CAG Board and the State Parent Council. CAG/PAC gives financial and activity summary reports at the CAG annual business meeting. Regular columns are written for the Communicator and the annual report is published in the Communicator. CAG representatives who attend testimonials write reports to CAG/PAC.

In addition to allocation of funds to campaigns, the membership is encouraged to campaign actively for endorsed candidates and issues. The how-to-and-when-to-campaign information is provided to the local membership via their elected regional representatives on the CAG Board and the State Parent Council.

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS THAT ADVOCATE FOR GIFTED/TALENTED EDUCATION — GIFTED CHILDREN'S ASSOCIATIONS

In general, gifted children's associations (GCAs) are nonprofit, have paid memberhips, have elected officers, are governed by a set of bylaws, operate on a voluntary system, and work very closely with school districts and community college districts. They can be (1) associated with one school district, (2) regional and serving one school district, or (3) multiregional and serving many school districts.

The services offered by each GCA differ with the size and purpose of each association. Most provide some information on various aspects of giftedness or can locate a contact resource person, provide parent education because the membership is basically parents of gifted children, and provide some other service such as speakers, seminars, or conferences.

Larger GCA organizations can provide extracurricular enrichment classes geared toward the gifted/talented child, organize family field trips, distribute a newsletter, and maintain an office. Recently, one GCA began a gifted preschool class, while another maintained a low-cost Scholastic Aptitude Test preparatory class for college-bound high school students. GCAs also engage actively in gifted/talented advocacy.

The intent of all gifted children's associations is to nurture the gifted child and his family. This is done by providing a network of information, an association with other parents with similar problems and interests, or providing enrichment opportunities to expand the realm of the gifted child. Recently one GCA addressed themselves to some of the problems of the underachieving gifted child — dropouts and visual problems.

How To Write An Effective Letter

Letters from constituents are extremely important to decision makers, since most of them do want to know what the people they represent think about issues. Too often laws are passed and/or policy decisions made with little or no interest shown by constitutents. Many letters in support of or in opposition to an issue do have significant impact. A letter is more important than most people realize.

When educational issues are being considered, letters from parents may often be more persuasive to legislators and other decision makers than are those from educators.

The following tips for writing to local, state, or federal government officials have been compiled from many sources, particularly from the work of David Kret, former Senator from Arizona.

1. Identify yourself, position, community, the basis of your interest in gifted/talented, or expertise in the area.
2. State your request in the first paragraph and identify the legislation by bill number if your letter is in regard to specific legislation. (AB and number for an Assembly Bill, SB and number for a Senate Bill—for California bills. Example: AB 1040)
3. Show your appreciation for any previous support in this area.
4. Advance the main arguments in favor of your position in a factual manner, but be as brief as possible. Explain why the issue is important to you.
5. Assume that your letter will be read, considered, filed, and acted upon.
6. Be courteous, constructive, reasonable, and never threaten, or you will lose credibility.
7. Never give exaggerated or misleading information that might embarrass your decision maker in front of his or her colleagues. Facts must be accurate. If you know the source, cite it.
8. Write letters in your own words. Form letters or mimeographed cards do not produce interest or results.
9. Use your own stationery and stamps. Unless you are an authorized spokesperson for your place of employment, never use your work time or materials for advocacy purposes.
10. State your office or area of responsibility and use organization stationery if representing a group.
11. Be neat—type if your handwriting is hard to read. Grammar and punctuation are not as important as your ideas, but do spell names correctly.
12. End with a note of appreciation and use your full name and address. This will let the official know that you are a constituent.

13. Send a letter of appreciation after he/she has supported your issue.
14. Share any special knowledge you have about an issue.
15. Include a copy of a reliable article supporting your point of view whenever possible.
16. Send copies of your letter to key staff members of a committee when you write your legislator.

When a bill is moving through the legislative process, the timing of your letter, phone call, or visit is important.

Send letters:

1. to your own representatives when a bill is being formulated.
2. to committeemen when a bill is in a particular committee.
3. to all legislators when a bill is headed for the floor.
4. to the Governor when a bill has been sent to him.

If time is short a telegram can be sent or a phone call made. Staff in most legislators' offices do keep a log of constituent letters, telegrams, and calls made to them about pending bills.

Address letters as follows:

U. S. Senator

The Honorable (full name)
The United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator _____:

Congressman

The Honorable (full name)
The United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman _____:

State Legislators

The Honorable _____
California State Assembly (or Senate)
The State Capitol
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Assemblyman (or Senator) _____:

Address the Governor as:

The Honorable Jerry Brown
The Governor of California
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Governor Brown:

local contact's address
to show the legislator
he/she is a constituent

date

The Honorable John James
California State Assembly
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

SAMPLE

Dear Assemblyman James,

As a parent (teacher) of gifted children I am most concerned with the future of education in California. As you probably know, the current state-funded program for gifted and talented students was established just last session with AB 1040. The new gifted and talented programs have just four years to develop and be evaluated before the sunset date. I would be pleased to help keep you abreast of program progress in our district.

Yours truly,

Information Useful For Advocacy Purposes

Equal education is the foundation of the right to be a human being... This does not mean that any gifted child or any child having a greater capability to learn may or shall be deprived or his or her opportunity of learning more. It does mean that every child shall have the equal opportunity to learn to the best of his or her ability. That opportunity must be made available to all on equal terms.

Alfred Gitelson, Judge, County of Los Angeles Superior Court Case 822854, as quoted in "The Bulletin of the Gifted Children's Association, San Fernando Valley, Inc." May 1971

Gifted and talented people are not so rare as we once believed. They are in every state, city, and school—in every racial and socio-economic group. It is estimated there are as many as 2,580,000 gifted and talented young people in our schools. They are a significant national resource. The importance to the public of properly educating our gifted/talented youth has never been greater. We will need their insights to help solve the increasingly serious and complex social and technical problems society now faces.

- In California approxiately one out of every four students identified as gifted/talented is a minority student. For many of these minority students the gifted/talented program provides the only means for them to be educated in an environment emphasizing excellence.
- Sputnik propelled the California State Legislature to launch a three-year study in 1957 on whether gifted children need special programs. The answer was yes.

  While the legislators then enacted a law providing for nonmandated programs, attitudinal support and funding in California was and has continued to be minimal. In 1980, only 13.9 million dollars were appropriated by the State of California for the purpose of providing special programs for 155,000 identified gifted students in California public schools—less than $90 per student.
- The federal role in delivery of services to the gifted/talented is practically nonexistent. In a 1980 report to Jordan J. Baruch, Assistant Secretary for Productivity, Technology, and Innovation, by the U.S. Commerce Technical Advisory Board titled *Learning Environments for Innovation,* the following statement was made:

  > Even if the unusually talented are lucky enough to be identified, the amount of money available to enrich their academic program can only be described as shocking. Although gifted and talented students comprise 3-5 percent of the school age population, only .003 percent of the federal funds for education (6.5 million dollars) are allocated for their benefit.

  Under "The Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981" signed by President Reagan on August 13, 1981, these meager funds will be reduced. Furthermore, under this legislation, states are not required to spend any of the money of gifted/talented programs.

- Although special programs for the gifted and talented have been conducted for the last half century, they have never been widespread or systematic, even at periods of high national interest, despite mounting evidence of beneficial results when programs have been initiated. Abraham Tannebaum, Columbia University, wrote, in 1980:

  > Professionals and layment alike have often reacted ambivalently to these gifted and talented children, appreciating their special qualities while doubting their right to special education enrichment on the grounds that it smacks of elitism. There are educators who believe that the gifted can make it on their own without extra help and regard differentiated programs for such children as luxuries that are welcome when they are affordable and quickly disposable when they are not.

- The Commerce report to Jordan J. Baruch continues:

  > . . . in the generations now growing up in the country, the pool of human resources for innovation must increase rather than diminish, and we must examine the institutions and environments in which such skills [technological, artistic, and aesthetic] are encouraged and nourished. . . Further, we know that the innovative urge and entrepreneurial behavior are culturally biased. . .
  >
  > Today there is increasing fear that prevailing attitudes and forms of behavior which occur in the education, industrial and informational environment of a mature United States society tend to discourage rather than encourage innovation. . . . What is required is a new conception of the role of education in stimulating innovation and talent development while facilitating participation of previously excluded groups [women and minorities]. . .
  >
  > What we fear is that the basic educational philosophy is far too biased in the direction of remedial learning and fails to identify, much less foster, the development of special talents or unique skills.

- In addition, a status report by S. P. Marland, Jr., U.S. Commission of Education, to the Congress of the United States, 1971, on the education of gifted and talented children indicated:

  > "There is considerable 'spill-over' of techniques originated in gifted classes. . . In their effect on the regular program, the special programs for the gifted have been highly successful."

WE URGE THAT IMMEDIATE STEPS BE TAKEN BY FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL OFFICIALS TO GIVE PROGRAMS FOR THE IDENTIFICATION AND TRAINING OF GIFTED/TALENTED STUDENTS THEIR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION AND PRIORITY.

Information Useful For Advocacy—Early History Of CAG

The California Association for the Gifted began almost as a "therapy" group for a very few persons working as coordinators of the gifted in the 1961-62 school year. The first legislation in the State of California authorizing minimal financial assistance for programs for the gifted began with the school year 1961-62.

In the spring of 1962 several coordinators of the fledgling programs for the gifted met for lunch with Dr. Ruth Martinson in the faculty dining room at the then Long Beach State College. Dr. Martinson had been the director of the three-year State Study on Programs for the Gifted which resulted in the original legislation for the gifted. The purpose of that first meeting was to share successes, problems, needs, and curriculum ideas for the newly implemented programs for the gifted. That small group of people decided that there was a need for a continuing dialogue among themselves for mutual problem solving and encouragement. In that group were Ruth Martinson, Long Beach State College, Jeanne Delp, Garden Grove Unified School District, Sandy Williams, Long Beach Unified School District, Eleanor Manning, East Whittier School District, Gertrude Wood, Los Angeles County Schools, and George Banks, San Diego City Schools.

Numerous requests for assistance and direction from the gradually expanding number of school districts who were beginning or planning to begin programs for the gifted made the group aware of a desperate need for a wider sharing of ideas. Little by little the group grew to fourteen or fifteen coordinators who met at Long Beach State College informally on a monthly basis through the fall of 1962. A conference was planned for the purpose of presenting implementation ideas for coordinators and curriculum ideas for teachers and, in the spring of 1963, what later became the first annual conference of the California Association for the Gited was held on the campus of Long Beach State College. Approximately seventy-five persons attended that conference. Twenty-five coordinators and a few teachers continued to meet during 1963-64. A second conference was held in the Spring of 1964.

It was at that second conference that the idea of an association for the gifted was first proposed. During that year 1963-64 the group organized naming Ruth Martinson as president. Work on the by-laws began in 1964 with Jean Wiener as president. The bylaws were presented to the group and adopted in the spring of 1966 at the conference at Long Beach State College. Jeanne Delp was the first president to operate with the official bylaws of the California Association for the Gifted.

Active parent participation has always been a part of the California Association for the Gifted. In the 1960s, Beverly King and Cathy Kennard, parents from the San Fernando Valley area, were actively assisting professionals in legislative lobbying in Sacramento. Whenever fiscal or legislative crises arose at the state level, parents from several other parent groups also became willing assistants in the lobbying process.

The concept of a statewide parent committee becoming a part of the association first emerged in the spring of 1977. Ruth Fenton, a parent from Carmel, was asked to spearhead the effort of establishing regional parent councils in fifteen areas of the state. A statewide parent-council meeting of the association was held in December, 1978. Lorraine Bostick, a parent from Garden Grove, was elected chairperson. The Statewide Parent Council has been active and effective in the advocacy movement.

The purposes of the organization have always remained the same:

To strive to improve the education of gifted students
To seek adequate state support through legislative efforts
To create an awareness of the need for programs for the gifted
To encourage parent advocacy
To support activities which will provide training to teachers

The growth and viability of CAG is the direct result of teachers, administrators, parents, and college professors working together over the years to keep the organization growing and providing service to the continual parade of new and intersted persons - teachers, administrators, educators, and legislators.

What California Organizations Can Advocates Join?

CAG AFFILIATE ORGANIZATIONS

(at time of publication)

Name	Contact	Address/Phone
Association for Educators of Gifted/Talented (AEG/T), Santa Clara	Gwen Bindon	830 W. McKinley Sunnyvale, CA 94088 (408) 736-4981
Association of San Diego Educators of the Gifted (ASDEG)	Maria Benedict	2376 Caminito Seguro San Diego, CA 92107 (714) 224-9653
Fresno Parents of the Gifted	Beth Marhenke	4841 North Jackson Fresno, CA 93726 (209) 226-4377
Gifted Children's Association, Long Beach	Pat Eriksen	Box 1527 Long Beach, CA 90801
Gifted Children's Association of the Foothills (GCA)	Karen Ezaki	P.O. Box 4132 Covina, CA 91723 (213) 339-0886
Gifted Children's Association, San Fernando Valley	Heather de la Vega	17915 Ventura Blvd., #230 Encino, CA 91316 (213) 344-0314
Northern California Council of Programs for Gifted (NORCAL)	James Mulholland	Berkeley U.S.D. 1720 Oregon Street Berkeley, CA 94703 (415) 644-6336
Orange County Council for Gifted Education (OCC)	Maxine Schenck	14101 Windsor Place Santa Ana, CA 92705 (714) 544-2536
Pegasus	Lorraine Bostick Laura Katz	5431 Santa Rita Ave. Garden Grove, CA 92645
Professional Advocates for Gifted Education (PAGE)	Richard Sholseth Office of the Los Angeles County Supt. of Schools 9300 E. Imperial Hwy. Downey, CA 90242 (213) 922-6380	1601 Westerly Terrace Los Angeles, CA 90026 (213) 660-4045

Riverside/San Bernardino Counties Council for Gifted/Talented (Riverdino)	Joan Hanor Ontario Montclair 950 West D Ontario, CA 91762 (714) 983-9501 Ext. 122	512 West Granada Court Ontario, CA 91762 (714) 984-8852
Riverside Advocates for Gifted Youth (RAGY)	Donna Georgakakos	2943 Mary Street Riverside, CA 92506
Sacramento Area Gifted Association (SAGA)	Terry Thomas	2516 Waterton Way Sacramento, CA 95826 (916) 454-6791
San Diego Association for Gifted Children (SDAGC)	Carolyn Wood	P.O. Box 99189 San Diego, CA 92109 (714) 271-0078
Parent Representatives of Gifted/Talented Education, Moreno Valley (PRO-GATE)	John Richardson	P.O. Box 112 Sunnymead, CA 92388

THE CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION FOR THE GIFTED

Sharon Mountford
CAG Membership
2368 Schoenborn St.
Canoga Park, CA 91304

Information can also be obtained from the State Department of Education GATE Management Team:

Elinor McKinney
Gifted/Talented Education
State Department of Education
State Education Building
721 Capitol Mall
Sacramento, CA 95814

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CAG's Ten Regions

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